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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 000214

SIPDIS

DEPT PASS TO USAID LAC/AA
SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD DAN JOHNSON
NSC FOR TOM SHANNON/KIM BREIER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [MASS](#) [PA](#)

SUBJECT: PARAGUAY: EMBASSY SEEKS TO AUGMENT AND ACCELERATE
MEDRETES

REF: A. ASUNCION 00188

[1](#)B. ASUNCION 00199

[1](#)C. ASUNCION 00200

[1](#)D. ASUNCION 00152

Classified By: Charge Kevin M. Johnson, for reason 1.4(d).

[1](#)1. (C) Last week, the Paraguayan Minister of Health announced that, in December the GOP will terminate a program that brings doctors from Cuba to live and practice in rural areas of Paraguay (ref A). Embassy believes President Duarte ordered the program's termination because he has run out of patience with leftist subversion and criminality in the Paraguayan countryside, and is convinced that leftists here and abroad seek to undermine his government (refs B and C). Vice President Castiglioni told Charge that he would like the GOP to put an end, as well, to a related program that sends Paraguayan medical students to Cuba on scholarships. The decision to terminate the Cuban Doctors program, along with Duarte's support for President Uribe in Colombia's recent dispute with Venezuela (ref D) and other recent actions and remarks by GOP officials, signals the possibility of a broader change in GOP policy towards Cuba and Venezuela more in line with U.S. policy.

[1](#)2. (C) An upcoming MEDRETE scheduled for February/March offers an excellent initial opportunity to help the GOP deal with the criticism it will face for terminating a program that assists poor people with limited access to medical attention. Embassy will augment its already robust PD plan for this MEDRETE to emphasize U.S. support as President Duarte takes a politically risky stand in line with U.S. policy. In the longer term, we will look for ways to encourage the GOP to go further (by ending the medical scholarship program, for example) and strengthen the position of those within the GOP and the Colorado party who reject closer ties with Cuba and Venezuela.

[1](#)3. (C) One way to achieve these objectives is to increase the number and scope of MEDRETES in Paraguay, and accelerate their timing. Past MEDRETES in Paraguay have been extremely successful. Given other high priorities for DOD in Paraguay, taking immediate advantage of the emerging new policy environment could pay big dividends with respect to those priorities, in addition to building on the successes of past MEDRETES. If the DOD planning process prevents additional MEDRETES in the short term, firm commitments for additional MEDRETES in the future might be announced soon and have a similar affect in demonstrating US support.

[1](#)4. (U) Embassy appreciates DOD and SOUTHCOM's cooperation in this area, and invites input on ways to implement the proposed augmentation and acceleration of MEDRETES. Please note that Embassy and the State Department are also exploring other ways to augment medical support for Paraguay in light of this new policy environment. We are not relying solely on DOD resources, but note the dramatic impact MEDRETES and other humanitarian efforts have had historically and after the August 2004 fire.
JOHNSON